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Seventy-third year

Provisional

8195th meeting

Wednesday, 28 February 2018, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/138)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/138)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2018/138, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: We have received a lot of questions about resolution 2401 (2018), which the Security Council adopted on Saturday, 22 February, and its demand for a cessation of hostilities without delay for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria. I want to start today by answering the questions we have received. Is the United Nation ready to deliver to people who need humanitarian assistance? Yes. We have convoys ready to go to 10 besieged and hard-to-reach locations, including a 45-truck convoy with aid for 90,000 people to Douma and eastern Ghouta. Are you ready to support medical evacuations from eastern Ghouta? Yes, we are working very closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other health partners on that. Has resolution 2401 (2018) been implemented? Is there a ceasefire in Syria? No, and no. Have you got any inter-agency cross-line convoys through to hard-to-reach or besieged areas? No. Have you been given permission to access any of those locations? No. Have you received the necessary facilitation letters for convoys? No. Have there been any medical evacuations? No. Have any civilians left eastern Ghouta? No. Is there any actual improvement in the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta since the adoption of the resolution demanding, as it did, unimpeded access? No. Can you deliver assistance in eastern Ghouta during a humanitarian pause between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. local time? To quote the ICRC Middle East Director, who spoke about that yesterday: "It is impossible to bring a humanitarian convoy in five hours." Agencies now have years of experience in that area, and it can take a day simply to pass checkpoints, even when the parties have agreed. The goods then have to be offloaded.

If there has been no humanitarian access since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) on Saturday, what has happened in the past few days? More bombing, fighting, death, destruction, maiming of women and children, hunger and misery — in other words, more of the same.

On 26 February, two days ago, airstrikes, barrel bombs and artillery shelling were reported across eastern Ghouta, including in Harasta, Shafuniyeh, Otaya, Hosh Eldawahreh, Al-Ashari, Jobar, Beit Sawa, Hazerma, Hannnura, Nashabiyeh, Sagba and Douma. Reports indicate that at least 30 civilians, including women and children, were killed. In Shafuniyeh, 14 people, including three women and four children, were reportedly killed and many others injured by airstrikes. Eighteen civilians, including drivers of ambulances, women and children, were reportedly received at health facilities in Shafuniyeh with difficulties breathing, consistent with the use of chlorine. One child reportedly died as a result. On the same day, two workers from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were reportedly killed as a result of shelling on the besieged enclave. It was also reported that two health-care facilities in Saqba were taken out of service by airstrikes. In the past few days, shells have also reportedly continued to fall on Damascus city from eastern Ghouta.

Since 18 February, more than 580 people are now reported to have been killed due to air and ground strikes in eastern Ghouta, with many more than 1,000 people injured. At the same time, hundreds of rockets fired from eastern Ghouta into Damascus have reportedly killed 15 people and injured more than 200.

I now want to update the Security Council on the situation in other parts of the country.

In Idlib, fighting continues to kill and injure civilians, destroy civilian infrastructure and result in large population movements. Since December, an estimated 385,000 people have been displaced, with many civilians moving north. Half of Idlib's population was already displaced. People are being forced to move yet again, with each disruption increasing their vulnerability. Civilians are concentrated in an ever-smaller area. Many are forced to live in makeshift camps or in the open air. Formal camps are overwhelmed, operating at up to 400 per cent of their capacity. The response is being stretched to its limits.

We are receiving reports of civilian deaths and injuries and of restriction on the movement of many civilians as a result of military operations in Afrin. Those who risk moving continue to be stopped at exit points by the local authorities in Afrin, preventing them from accessing safer areas. We believe that, so far, approximately 5,000 people have reached the surrounding villages and Aleppo city. Tens of thousands are believed to be displaced within Afrin. The Turkish authorities have emphasized to us their willingness to facilitate humanitarian access. We would like to see aid convoys operated from Damascus. However, to date that has not been agreed by the Syrian side.

In Raqqa city, conditions remain unsafe for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Among those trying to return home, 637 people have been injured and more than 125 killed by unexploded ordinance since last October. Medical and other essential services are absent and access for humanitarian workers to the city remains precariously limited because the conditions are so dangerous. As I have said before, demining activities need to be accelerated as a matter of urgency.

Humanitarian access for the United Nations and its implementing partners in Hasakah was limited for much of January due to the increased restrictions placed by the local authorities. United Nations convoys were blocked from travelling to the northeast from elsewhere within the country. The delivery of aid already in local warehouses was also blocked. While an agreement to resume humanitarian deliveries was reached on 30 January, that agreement will end in March. NGO partners continue to deliver goods and services across the north-east. However, sustainable access for the United Nations is critical. Any protracted interruption of humanitarian assistance and services in the IDP sites may drive the displaced people back to areas where they are not safe.

Earlier this month, the United Nations received clearance for the first assessment visit to Deir ez-Zor after it had been under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for three and a half years. More than 100,000 people live in the town despite that fact that it is estimated to be 80 per cent destroyed. The infrastructure is almost completely destroyed, particularly in the central and the eastern areas, where ISIL was in control. In coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the United Nations has dispatched 78 trucks carrying food, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, education, water and sanitation items since last September, when ISIL was driven out.

Finally, we remain concerned about the tens of thousands of people stranded in Rukban, in south-eastern Syria. We continue to seek the necessary agreements for convoys of life-saving assistance to them.

As I said last week (see S/PV. 8186), there was a severe reduction, of nearly 40 per cent, in cross-line access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in 2017 as compared to 2016. On average in 2017, over the entire 12-month period, we reached 165,000 people a month with cross-line convoys. That was completely inadequate. So far this year, we have reached a total of only 7,200 people through a single small convoy earlier this month. In other words, we were reaching more than 50 times as many people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas last year as to date this year. The main reason for the reduction in the number of convoys has been the consistent refusal by the Government of Syria to provide the necessary approvals and facilitation letters to support delivery.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/138) details, while we continue to reach millions of people in urgent need in areas controlled by the Government of Syria and through the cross-border programmes mandated in resolution 2393 (2017), assistance across conflict lines to millions of people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas has completely collapsed in recent months. Unless that changes, we will soon see even more people dying from starvation and disease than from the bombing and shelling.

The United Nations remains focused on reaching those most in need throughout the country, including the 5.6 million people considered to be in acute need. The needs-based approach means that the United Nations will continue to seek to deliver aid and to

provide services to millions of people in a principled manner regardless of where they are located. More than half of those in need are in Government-controlled areas. However, millions more people are not.

What the Syrian people need has been made abundantly clear — protection, access to basic goods and services, an end to sieges and respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Security Council has unanimously supported all such needs in adopting resolution 2401 (2018).

I started today by answering questions that we have received regarding resolution 2401 (2018). I would like to end with a question for the Security Council. When will the resolution be implemented?

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council following the comprehensive briefing by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock.

In two weeks, we will mark the beginning of the eighth year of the Syrian conflict. There are no words to express our frustration over the collective failure of the international community to end this war, but that frustration is nothing compared to the suffering and destruction visited ceaselessly upon the Syrian people. We are here again today because the brief respite that the Council unanimously demanded only days ago in resolution 2401 (2018) has not materialized, as Mr. Lowcock just described. The air strikes, shelling and ground offensives continue. There are even reports of yet another chlorine gas attack. What we need is the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), and that is not happening.

Nearly seven years since the peaceful protests in Dar'a and the reaction that set in motion what would eventually become all-out war, we are still grasping for a political solution, which is the only way to end the bloodletting. The Secretary-General has called eastern Ghouta a hell on Earth. The United Nations will continue to work with Syrians and the international community to help bring about a durable political solution. We will also continue to demand that all the parties involved in the conflict respect international humanitarian law — the rules of war — and protect civilians. We will continue to demand the release of those who have been arbitrarily detained and the end of enforced disappearances. We will continue to forcefully call for justice and accountability. Those responsible for the catalogue of horrors that mark daily life in Syria, including chemical and terrorist attacks, torture and sexual violence, sieges and attacks on hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, must be held accountable. Those outrages continue in large part because the perpetrators have so far enjoyed impunity.

As the Secretary-General said earlier this week, "Security Council resolutions are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented". The United Nations acknowledges Russia's announcement of a daily five-hour pause for eastern Ghouta. In addition to Mr. Lowcock's briefing and what the International Committee of the Red Cross has stated, we respectfully remind all parties that resolution 2401 (2018) demands the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid for a minimum of 30 consecutive days. The Secretariat and relevant agencies are united and pulling in one direction towards the immediate and continuous cessation of hostilities that can be sustained beyond 30 days for unimpeded aid delivery. We also urgently need to get humanitarian aid and services in and the sick and critically wounded evacuated from besieged eastern Ghouta and other locations. We are ready to deliver.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly reminded parties of their absolute obligation under international humanitarian law and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Earlier this month, Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock told the Council (see S/PV.8186) in no uncertain terms that that is an obligation, not a favour. He has just updated us all on the humanitarian situation and provided an update on the United Nations readiness to deliver aid and services, and the tireless efforts of humanitarians to reach all in need, wherever they are. But right now we must address the particular needs of those in besieged eastern Ghouta.

Resolution 2401 (2018) affirms that the cessation of hostilities shall not apply to military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front, and

> "all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council". (*resolution 2401 (2018), para. 2*).

In our view, that rightly maintains the parameters set out in resolution 2254 (2015), but there must be

a frank assessment of what that means in relation to the humanitarian tragedy that we are witnessing in eastern Ghouta.

First, we condemn all violations of international law by all parties, including shelling from eastern Ghouta, which has injured or killed civilians in Damascus. The scale of the Government's indiscriminate military attacks against eastern Ghouta — an area with a civilian population of 400,000 — cannot be justified based on targeting Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters. Efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Secondly, the United Nations has not seen any confirmation by the Government of Syria of its commitment to implement resolution 2401 (2018), although at the resolution's adoption Syria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations said,

> "As a State, we bear a responsibility towards our citizens and we have a sovereign right to counter terrorism" (*S/PV.8188, p. 12*).

Thirdly, yesterday the Head of the Syrian Negotiations Committee transmitted to the Secretary-General a letter on behalf of the three major non-State armed opposition groups — Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham — and civil groups in eastern Ghouta regarding their full commitment to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). Specifically, they committed to ensuring the necessary environment for United Nations humanitarian access as well as,

> "to expel all elements of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qaida and all who belong to these groups from eastern Ghouta".

Fourthly, the United Nations has no independent verified reports that those three non-State armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta created a coordination centre, as has been alleged regarding Jabhat Al-Nusra, nor has the United Nations seen any public announcement by those groups of such a centre. Jaysh Al-Islam has denied that claim. What the United Nations can verify is that non-State armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta, over the past 24 hours, have expressed their readiness in writing to evacuate Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters. Previous negotiations on that issue among those groups and key members of the International Syrian Support Group humanitarian task force in Geneva and Damascus have not resulted in success.

Alleviating the tragic situation in eastern Ghouta has the Council's full attention. Yet we cannot forget that resolution 2401 (2018) demands a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria. Violence continues in Afrin, Idlib and the eastern part of the country. Council members have heard about the humanitarian challenges and suffering of the people in those areas as well. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that developments in those areas will undoubtedly render the situation in Syria even more complex. There will be no sustainable solution if the Council's resolutions are not implemented. That will require that the parties step back from the brink and fulfil their obligations to end the fighting in Syria. All our efforts will be in vain if there is no serious investment in a political solution.

As Council members are aware, resolution 2401 (2018) calls on all Member States to use their influence with the parties to ensure the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations calls for a renewed commitment by all concerned Member States to work seriously to implement the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations also cautions against drawing the Organization into monitoring exercises. That has been tried in the past without success — not for lack of trying — but in the absence of political will among Member States to underpin United Nations efforts. Member States, especially those working within the Astana and Amman arrangements, should use their resources and clear influence over the parties to ensure the implementation of a sustained cessation of hostilities throughout Syria.

The conflict in Syria continues to threaten regional and international stability because the warring parties believe there is a military solution. There is not. The United Nations remains convinced that a political solution is the only way forward. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is pressing forward on facilitating the establishment of a constitutional committee in Geneva, as part of the overall intra-Syrian political process towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), for which the United Nations requires the positive and constructive engagement of both negotiating delegations. Special Envoy De Mistura will need the full support of the Council and the international community as a whole if the United Nations efforts are to have a chance of reinvigorating a serious and meaningful political process. I trust that he will have that support.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I make my remarks today on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait as co-penholders for the humanitarian track of the Security Council's work on the situation in Syria.

I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock once again for a very sobering update. We share his sense of urgency following the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) last weekend to fully take advantage of the 30-day pause so that the United Nations and its partners can dispatch life-saving aid convoys and begin medical evacuations. Since the resolution's adoption, we have been asked, as penholders, when the resolution would take effect and to whom it would apply. We are very clear: the resolution took effect upon its adoption and applies to all parties across the entire country. The clock is ticking. There is no time to lose.

Let me also sincerely thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing today. We share his deep concern concerning reports of the flagrant lack of compliance with the ceasefire in eastern Ghouta.

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all members of the Council for their constructive cooperation, which enabled the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). The resolution represents decisive and meaningful action by the Council in response to the calls from the United Nations, the humanitarian community and, above all, the civilian population in Syria. However, the value of a resolution is not in its adoption, but in its implementation. We must now all build on the spirit of cooperation that led to the resolution's adoption and work together to ensure that it is enforced. Compliance with the resolutions of the Security Council is not optional; it is an obligation of all Member States.

The humanitarian community stands ready to do its part. Having adopted this resolution, the Council must do its part. For the next few weeks, let us seize the opportunity that this resolution represents and focus on its implementation. We would like to make four concrete recommendations on the way forward.

First, existing de-escalation agreements must be complied with most urgently in eastern Ghouta. We call on the three Astana guarantors to spare no effort to achieve this end. Resolution 2401 (2018) clearly demands that all parties cease hostilities; air strikes, the ground offensive and shelling must stop.

We take note of the initial positive indications from armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta that they are ready to comply with the resolution. We also note their commitment to expel the Al-Nusra Front from the area. We must build on this, and we call on those with influence over armed opposition groups to secure their commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Clearly the Council has demanded in resolution 2401 (2018) that the Syrian Government cease all military operations without delay.

Secondly, as Mr. Lowcock has told us, the United Nations and its implementing partners in the field are ready to commence life-saving convoys and medical evacuations. We urge the Syrian authorities to immediately issue facilitation letters for the convoy to Duma to proceed this week as a necessary first step. It can no longer be business as usual; the Council has demanded weekly convoys to all areas and populations in need.

Thirdly, existing structures to strengthen compliance with and monitoring of the cessation must urgently be activated. We look to the Chairs of the Task Force on the Ceasefire of the International Syria Support Group to undertake more frequent meetings, which are needed at least on a weekly basis. The Amman operations room should also be utilized. We see merit in making a clearer link between monitoring mechanisms and the Security Council.

Fourthly, the Council must remain actively seized of this matter. Sweden and Kuwait will request an open briefing from the incoming presidency on the Secretary-General's report on implementation and compliance that is due 15 days after the resolution's adoption. We should also stand ready to meet and take appropriate action at any time necessary so as to ensure implementation of this resolution.

Finally, we welcome any efforts to de-escalate violence and to allow and facilitate humanitarian access in Syria, but let us be clear — resolution 2401 (2018) demands a 30-day, nationwide ceasefire, with immediate access for weekly convoys and medical evacuations. A five-hour ceasefire does not meet the requirements of the resolution. The resolution is not primarily about the evacuation of civilians, but demands humanitarian access to civilians and medical evacuations. The

cessation of hostilities must be implemented fully and without delay. It is imperative that all parties uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law at all times.

Last Saturday's unanimous action reinforced the legitimacy and credibility of the Security Council (see S/PV.8188). Today's briefings demonstrate that there is no time to rest on the laurels of this achievement. We must now move without delay to ensure our action here last Saturday is translated into the relief and assistance expected by the millions of people affected by this conflict. It is now incumbent on all the parties and all those with influence over the parties to spare no effort and use all channels available in order to advance the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I want to thank Mark Lowcock and Jeffrey Feltman for their very clear briefings.

I would like today to focus my remarks on our shared road map, namely, the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), which we adopted unanimously last Saturday (see S/PV. 8188). On behalf of France, I would like to express three main messages today.

My first message is that we must not pay lip service. The situation on the ground remains dramatic and has not improved in recent days. Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), the offensive against the eastern Ghouta has continued relentlessly. France, of course, strongly condemns these indiscriminate bombings, which affect inhabited areas and civil infrastructure. In this context, the disastrous humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. No United Nations convoy has been able to reach the eastern Ghouta or any of the other besieged areas, no emergency medical evacuation has been carried out, no siege has been lifted. The Syrian regime is maintaining its stranglehold on the civilian population and is methodically pursuing its policy of destruction. More than 400,000 people remain under siege in eastern Ghouta, including 130,000 children. The demand sent by the United Nations to authorize a priority convoy for Duma, the main city in eastern Ghouta, has not received any response from the Syrian authorities to date.

My second message is this. The resolution adopted by the Security Council on 24 February makes very specific demands on the parties. Hostilities must cease without delay in order to establish a lasting humanitarian truce for at least 30 days, in order to allow both the delivery of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of the wounded and sick. Let me stress this point. These demands are perfectly clear and cannot be distorted or reinterpreted. Contrary to what some would have us believe, the demands made by the resolution are absolutely clear. Our responsibility today is to implement, fully and in their totality, the provisions that we have unanimously adopted. If we do not that, what credibility can be given to our commitments? What credibility can be given to Security Council resolutions?

The United Nations and its partners tell us that they are ready to deliver aid to the people of eastern Ghouta and other priority areas. There is therefore not a minute to lose because every minute that passes can turn lives upside down.

At the conclusion of difficult negotiations, the Council managed to unite in the face of the gravity of the humanitarian situation and the escalation of the Syrian conflict in recent months. We must now work together, in the same spirit of unity, to effectively implement on the ground the resolution we unanimously adopted. This is my third message.

Following yesterday's meeting in Moscow with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, France is putting forward four concrete proposals for making progress and for doing so without delay.

The first is to ensure that all parties implement the cessation of hostilities that resolution 2401 (2018) demands. I note that the three main opposition groups present in eastern Ghouta as well as Nassar Al Hariri, head of the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition, have written to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Council to state that they would respect the truce. It is therefore urgent in the extreme — if I can put it that way — that the Damascus regime also unambiguously express its willingness to respect the Council resolution and to formalize it in writing.

We have taken note of the Russian proposal of a daily five-hour humanitarian truce. It is a positive first step, but it is insufficient. We must go further. Resolution 2401 (2018) demands of the parties a minimum period of 30 consecutive days of cessation of hostilities. Respecting that demand is non-negotiable. That goal requires more than just symbolic declarations or political posturing. At a minimum, it requires that humanitarian personnel be allowed to do their work.

These workers are used to taking risks on a daily basis, but the parties must allow them to do their work. Given that the opposition groups have formally committed to doing just that, the regime must do so as well, and without delay. To that end, supporters of the regime, beginning with Russia, must bring the necessary pressure to bear.

Our second proposal, by way of a demand, pertains to the need to immediately open the relevant, clearly identified checkpoints — beginning with Wafideen — in order to allow the access of priority convoys of the United Nations. We therefore demand that the Syrian authorities submit without delay the necessary letter to facilitate the deployment of humanitarian convoys.

Thirdly, it is extremely urgent to allow medical evacuations for the most critical cases, giving priority to children. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent indicates that 1,065 people need emergency medical evacuations. We have not a minute to lose.

Finally, France considers it essential to create a monitoring mechanism to ensure the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and compliance with the resolution by the parties. We are working diligently to establishing that mechanism now.

Those are the French proposals to address the urgent need to put an end to the bombing and protect civilians, who beyond resolution 2401 (2018), are protected under international humanitarian law. It is also crucial to intensify our efforts to reach a political solution in the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015). It is the only way out of the conflict and the only way to prevent a looming escalation of tensions. France will not deviate from that path. The overall credibility of the Security Council and the responsibility of each of its members are crucially at stake today in the context of the Syrian tragedy.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-Generals Lowcock and Feltman for their clear, factual briefings and for reiterating to all of us on the Security Council the ongoing horror of the conflict in Syria — and in particular in eastern Ghouta, because that is where it is clear the situation is most dire by a huge order of magnitude.

It was five days ago (see S/PV.8188) that we sat in this Chamber and all of us raised our hands in support of a 30-day ceasefire, which we hoped would provide some relief to Syria's people. That was a desperately needed step, one that came too late for many. In eastern Ghouta alone, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that at least 630 people were killed and 3,000 injured in the week before resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted, with women and children representing nearly 60 per cent of the wounded and 50 per cent of the deceased. We also continue to condemn attacks on Damascus from eastern Ghouta.

Let us recall the demands of our resolution. It called for at least a 30-day ceasefire without delay to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuation. "Without delay" means right now, immediately — that there should be no delay. We all voted for those demands and we committed to using our influence to ensure that. In response, Russia has declared a five-hour daily humanitarian window. That is not what the Council demanded, nor what Russia agreed to use its influence to ensure. A five-hour window has not delivered and cannot deliver any meaningful improvement on the ground. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has made clear that the United Nations cannot get humanitarian convoys in and out within that time frame, as has the International Committee of the Red Cross. Humanitarian pauses of a few meagre hours are no substitute for a sustained ceasefire, which is vital to ensuring the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations. If Russia is able to deliver a five-hour pause, let it deliver a 24-hour pause, as it agreed on Saturday.

Let us now take stock of the situation in Syria, and specifically in eastern Ghouta, where the situation is at its most desperate. Let us review if any real change has occurred in the past five days. Has the resolution been implemented? Has there been a ceasefire? Has there been any delivery of humanitarian aid or any medical evacuations? Has the adoption of the resolution brought any relief to the people of Syria?

The fighting has not stopped. All of the main armed opposition groups have committed to the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). The Al-Assad regime has not, and has in fact ignored the resolution we adopted. Reports of attacks and air strikes by pro-regime forces continue. Twenty-two air strikes reportedly took place even during Russia's so-called humanitarian pause. And, as if it could not get any worse, there have been disturbing reports of the use of chlorine gas. Doctors in eastern Ghouta reported to the Syrian-American Medical Society that 16 patients, including six children, were suffering from symptoms

indicative of exposure to chemical compounds, following an alleged regime attack on Sunday — only one day after the resolution was adopted. Since Saturday not a single aid convoy has been able to access eastern Ghouta to provide relief to the desperate civilians. The World Health Organization estimates that 1,000 people are now in need of medical evacuation from eastern Ghouta. None have been evacuated since the resolution was adopted.

The consequences of the failure to implement the resolution are clear: the casualties continue to rise and the horror continues. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports at least 14 civilians, including three children, were killed on Sunday. In short, in the words of one doctor from eastern Ghouta, "Nothing has changed."

It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that resolution 2401 (2018) is enacted in full. In the words of my Foreign Secretary, the Al-Assad regime must allow the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid, in compliance with resolution 2401 (2018), and we look to Russia and Iran to make sure this happens, in accordance with their own promises.

I implore all those with influence over the Syrian regime to act now to ensure that the ceasefire that they supported in the Chamber is implemented in full and immediately. To do anything less is an affront to the Council, the United Nations and the international system that we live by. We will continue to monitor the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and commit to returning to the Council regularly until we see it respected.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): Every time the Security Council attempts to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, we take a small leap of faith. I say "we" in reference to the Security Council. I speak of faith because all Council members and most States Members of the United Nations still genuinely try to uphold the responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, including abiding by and fully implementing Security Council resolutions. Despite the grim updates we heard today, we must maintain the hope that we can help the Syrian people. If we do not have that hope, we are wasting our time here.

Just four days ago, the Security Council took another leap of faith. We adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding a 30-day ceasefire for all of Syria, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to deliver desperately needed food and medical supplies, and immediate and unconditional medical evacuations based on need and emergency. Our goal was clear and simple. The Al-Assad regime and its supporters have been pummelling eastern Ghouta, where 400,000 people live under siege and constant bombardment. Resolution 2401 (2018) demanded that the assault stop. That was the Council speaking in one, clear voice. The opposition groups operating in eastern Ghouta have made clear their commitment to the ceasefire. The Free Syrian Army, Jaysh al-Islam, the Al-Rahman Legion and Ahrar al-Sham all committed to implementing resolution 2401 (2018).

Against all odds, we hoped that Mr. Al-Assad might respect the resolution, cease hostilities and allow unfettered humanitarian access to all those who need it. Against all odds, we hoped that Russia would use its influence to ensure Mr. Al-Assad's commitment to resolution 2401 (2018). Once again, that hope has been crushed because so far, for the people of eastern Ghouta, nothing has changed. Despite the unanimous call for a ceasefire, the regime's attacks continue unabated. Hundreds of Syrians have been killed or injured since we adopted the resolution on Saturday. What is worse is that less than 24 hours after we demanded the ceasefire, there were reports that the Al-Assad regime again used chlorine gas as a weapon. Such attacks demonstrate Syria's complete and utter contempt for the Council and the United Nations.

On Monday one human rights organization reported 18 attacks that defied the Council's demands. On Tuesday another organization reported at least 23 air strikes and four barrel bombs in eastern Ghouta. Syrians on the ground are reporting that Tuesday was worse than Monday with regard to strikes from the regime. How can that be? On the humanitarian front, as Mark Lowcock stated, the Al-Assad regime has allowed no deliveries of assistance into eastern Ghouta — not one. Opposition groups in the area have expressed their commitment to allowing aid in, but the Al-Assad regime still says no.

Since we adopted resolution 2401 (2018), Russia has announced a daily five-hour humanitarian pause in the aerial bombing of civilians in eastern Ghouta, which is cynical, callous and in flagrant defiance of the demands of resolution 2401 (2018). The cessation of hostilities is for at least 30 days — every day, all day. Russia does not get to unilaterally rewrite the terms of the resolution. It negotiated it and voted for it. Russia,

Iran and the Al-Assad regime are not even trying to hide their intentions. They are asking civilians to leave eastern Ghouta on the false premise that they can then attack anyone left in the area as much as they would like. Let us call the actions what they are. Mr. Al-Assad and his allies want the civilians of eastern Ghouta to walk into the arms of a regime that has been attacking and starving them for the past seven years. That is not a humanitarian gesture. They do not care if the 400,000 people of eastern Ghouta suffer, as long as they can continue to pursue their military and political objectives.

We know what Iran, Syria and the Al-Assad regime are doing because they have done the same thing in the past. It is the same playbook they used for Aleppo in 2016. Once again, we, including Russia, demanded in the Security Council Chamber that Mr. Al-Assad stop the bombing, and yet Russia, Iran and Mr. Al-Assad continue their attacks, defying the wishes of the Council and of the international community. Because we have been through this before, we know what Russia will say today. It will say that there are terrorists in eastern Ghouta so that the Al-Assad regime can bomb as ferociously and indiscriminately as it wants and kill as many civilians as it wants. That defies the principles governing the laws of war. The Al-Assad regime should not be allowed to bomb and starve its own people into submission under the guise of counter-terrorism. That Russian argument makes a mockery of the Council and of international law.

Russia also accuses the United States of somehow being responsible for humanitarian crises in Syria, but such accusations are ludicrous. The United States does not block humanitarian aid in any area. In fact, the United States has provided more than $7 billion in humanitarian aid in response to the crisis. The Council must not fall for Russia's misdirections. When the ceasefire was adopted unanimously on Saturday, including by the Russians, Ambassador Haley stated that our resolve to stand by our demands in the resolution would be tested. It has come to pass. Despite everything that has happened since Saturday, we are not casting aside the ceasefire in Syria; just the opposite. We would like to redouble our efforts in the Security Council to implement it, but the only way to change the situation on the ground is for all of us — every single one of us — around the table and each State Member of the United Nations to speak the truth about what is happening.

The past four days should show us that when it comes to demanding a ceasefire, it is not enough to say that all parties should show restraint or commit to the ceasefire because in eastern Ghouta there is only one party dropping barrel bombs, gassing the Syrian people and denying deliveries of food and medical assistance. It is the Al-Assad regime, operating with the full support of Russia and Iran.

On Saturday we stated that the only way to restore the credibility of the Council was to make the ceasefire a reality. Russia, Iran and the Al-Assad regime have not complied with the Council's demands and have not silenced their guns. Unless we take action, they will stop at nothing to destroy eastern Ghouta and we will again fail to help the Syrian people.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First, let me thank Under-Secretaries-General Lowcock and Feltman for their briefings.

In my statement I will address three points: implementation, implementation and implementation.

First, I will speak about the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. Since the Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018) on Saturday, civilians are still dying in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria. The humanitarian disaster continues worsen. We need a full, nationwide cessation of hostilities and we need it now. The Russian proposal for a humanitarian corridor and pauses of five hours per day cannot be a substitute for a humanitarian pause of 30 consecutive days, as demanded in resolution 2401 (2018). Those five hours do not meet the obligations under the resolution and are not enough for the United Nations to be effective in delivering aid to the entire area of Ghouta, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock just stated.

We call upon the parties to the conflict and on those with influence on the parties to show decisive action and stop the violence. As Under-Secretary-General Feltman stated, three armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta have announced that they are committed to fully implementing resolution 2401 (2018). We expect the regime to do the same. The air strikes, the shelling and the shooting must stop. For the credibility of the Council, it is crucial that its resolutions be fully implemented. That is the obligation of all States Members of the United Nations, under the Charter.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands repeats the call made by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, to the Astana guarantors. She called on the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey to

> "take all necessary steps to ensure that the fighting stops, the Syrian people are protected and that urgent humanitarian access and necessary medical evacuations are taking place".

My second point is about the implementation of humanitarian access. Resolution 2401 (2018) calls for sieges of populated areas, including eastern Ghouta, to be lifted immediately, and demands safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian convoys. As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock just explained, the United Nations stands ready with 45 trucks to deliver essential aid to eastern Ghouta. But the necessary facilitation letters are still lacking, and the security conditions do not permit those deliveries. At this point, more than 1,000 people are in urgent need of medical care, but they are still trapped in eastern Ghouta. If they are not given the care they need in hospitals in Damascus or elsewhere, they may die. The United Nations and the Security Council have consistently pleaded for these medical evacuations, and yet there are still no developments with regard to them. We also need to see access to aid for those fleeing the fighting in Afrin. More generally, there should be delivery of humanitarian aid to the areas that are not under Government control. As Mr. Feltman just said, we should reach all who are in need, wherever they are.

My third point is about implementing the protection of civilians. The exception on the cessation of hostilities in paragraph 2 of the resolution allows targeted action against terrorists who are designated as such by the Council. However, that does not mean that absolutely anything is allowed. International humanitarian law applies to all military combat operations and counter-terrorism actions. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be respected in all circumstances. The civilians in the conflict must be protected. There is talk of humanitarian corridors for civilians who want to leave eastern Ghouta, but evacuations should always be voluntary. We are concerned about the possibility that humanitarian corridors will be used for forced population transfers. Civilians cannot be forced to leave, and neither should they be forced to stay. If voluntary evacuations do take place, we will call on the United Nations to monitor them.

Currently, the most urgent humanitarian situation is in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, but needs remain high elsewhere in Syria as well. We welcomed the January delivery of aid to Rukban, but we want to stress the importance of sustained access and a durable solution. As others have said today, the demining activities in Raqqa should be increased, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands is doing its part in that regard. The media coverage of the issue of the exploitation of Syrian women in exchange for aid is very disturbing. There should be no tolerance of such behaviour, as the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have already said. The probity of any United Nations implementing parties should be beyond any doubt.

In conclusion, we must ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) is fully implemented. There can be no military solution to the conflict, and we call on all the parties to engage seriously in the United Nations-led political process as a matter of urgency. The suffering of the people of Syria has lasted for more than seven years. For the sake of the millions of women, children and men trapped in this horrendous war, it is high time that all parties started putting the protection, interests and well-being of the Syrian people on the top of their agenda. Yesterday, my Minister, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, said that humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are cornerstones of international humanitarian law. They are part of our shared values and shared humanity. The Security Council must do justice to those values and to our shared humanity.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you for convening today's meeting, Mr. President, and for the briefings by Mr. Lowcock and Mr. Feltman on the situation in Syria.

On Saturday, when we adopted resolution 2401 (2018) after long and complex negotiations, we highlighted the commitment that Council members have shown to achieving a humanitarian ceasefire in Syria. As we said at the time, it will be crucial to closely monitor its proper implementation and to maintain the Council's unity with regard to its responsibility to protect the civilian population, in line with international law and international humanitarian law.

Four days in, we are still being forced to lament and condemn the attacks on civilians and to reiterate

our calls for the immediate and comprehensive implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). As the Secretary-General has pointed out, Council resolutions make sense only if they are effectively implemented. The credibility of the Security Council as a whole, and of those of its members with the greatest potential influence on the ground in particular, is at stake. In the light of this, we want to emphasize that the cessation of hostilities that the Council has demanded clearly covers the whole of Syrian territory, including eastern Ghouta and Afrin, and should last for a minimum of 30 days. If we are to ensure that, in our view we should mobilize the International Syria Support Group's Ceasefire Task Force. It is essential to ensure that all the parties to the conflict comply with the ceasefire provided for in resolution 2401 (2018), and that the Council is able to closely monitor that compliance. In that regard, we support the four recommendations outlined by Sweden and Kuwait.

We must remind the Syrian authorities of their responsibility to protect their people, and we firmly condemn the military operations in eastern Ghouta and other areas of the country that have continued even after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). However, we welcome the strenuous efforts of the Organization, and of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, to prepare 45 trucks carrying supplies and ready to enter eastern Ghouta as soon as the necessary permits are granted. The first report on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) will be presented in less than two weeks, and we hope that it will be able to inform us that the humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian conflict has been alleviated, because we cannot wait any longer. It is the Security Council's duty to continue working relentlessly to achieve what we have all unanimously agreed on.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I very much appreciate today's clear and informative briefings by Mr. Lowcock and Mr. Feltman, and I would like to share a few thoughts from Poland's point of view.

Since the Council's adoption on Saturday of resolution 2401 (2018), we have been seeing yet more extremely worrying developments on the ground. As I said in my last statement on the subject (see S/PV.8188), the heavy fighting in Syria has unfortunately not only continued but is increasing. In that context, we should persist in our efforts to take every possible action to ensure the resolution's full and safe implementation. We call on all to work to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children, by giving them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance. That should include voluntary evacuation, which should be strictly overseen by the United Nations and its implementing partners and based solely on medical need, in order to ensure that the process is genuinely voluntary. We would like to stress that all the relevant actors should use all their influence to help to improve the conditions on the ground immediately.

We urgently call for a cessation of hostilities throughout all of Syria for 30 days, as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018). In that context, it is also important to note that the cessation of hostilities may also offer an opportunity for the talks being held under United Nations auspices in Geneva to gain momentum, so that a political solution can finally be reached. For that reason, we call on all parties to fulfil their commitments to the existing ceasefire agreements.

It should be emphasized that the implementation of the ceasefire announced by resolution 2401 (2018) should ensure the safe entrance and stay of humanitarian and medical personnel without prejudice to their health or life. When such personnel enter hard-to-reach areas, we should know precisely how long they can stay while delivering assistance under the ceasefire, otherwise their lives could also be in danger.

In conclusion, let me stress the importance of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the implementation of humanitarian resolutions. The unanimous adoption of the resolution is just the beginning of the process. We call on all actors with influence on the ground to take all steps necessary to ensure that the fighting stops, that the Syrian people are protected and, finally, that urgent humanitarian access is enabled and that the necessary medical evacuations can take place.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their respective briefings.

Once again, we would like to say how appalled we are at the terrible situation suffered by the Syrian people, as the past two months have been the most violent since the start of the conflict, and civilians, primarily women and children, are the ones that are suffering the gravest consequences of this intensification of the war. We call the attention of the Security Council to the continuing

violations of international law, especially international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as these attacks have targeted civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and homes.

My delegation would like to express once again its gratitude to the delegations of Sweden and Kuwait for their work in promoting the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which imposes a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria, which is as urgent as it is necessary. We urge the parties to implement the resolution immediately in order to speed up access of humanitarian assistance without any restrictions, allow urgent medical evacuations and the entry of humanitarian convoys, and ensure the protection of hospitals and medical facilities, especially in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and north of Hama.

We wish to underscore once again the need for continued cooperation and coordination among the Syrian Government and the various humanitarian assistance agencies, so that the delivery of humanitarian assistance can be effective, especially in hard-to-reach areas, and to prevent administrative obstacles from derailing or negatively affecting the deployment of the required humanitarian assistance.

We also stress the need to begin, as soon as possible, humanitarian mine-clearing in areas that require it, in particular in the city of Raqqa, to allow the return in dignified and safe conditions of people who were forced to flee their homes because of the conflict.

As we have stated previously, we believe that if our aim is to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people in the face of armed violence, the Security Council has the major challenge of maintaining its unity so as to ensure that this organ's decisions are implemented. We reiterate that the solution to this conflict can be found only through an inclusive political process based on dialogue and coordination, led by the Syrian people and for the Syrian people, that will make it possible to reach a peaceful solution among all parties involved. With this in mind, we wish to highlight the various forums for dialogue, specifically the Astana process, at which de-escalation zones were agreed on that must be respected by all parties. We will be closely following the next round of the process.

We wish also to highlight the other opportunities for dialogue that could make it possible to reach further compromises to achieve a definitive end to hostilities, such as the Sochi national dialogue, which is aimed at strengthening the Geneva political process, with respect for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and its right to choose its own political, economic and social system without any external pressure or interference.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks Mr. Jeffrey Feltman and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their respective briefings on recent developments in the situation in Syria following the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2401 (2018), on the humanitarian situation in Syria. My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his unstinting efforts as part of the political dialogue among the Syrian parties with the aim of arriving at a lasting solution to the protracted crisis ravaging that country.

In that regard, my country welcomes the holding of intra-Syrian peace talks on 25 and 26 January in Vienna in the framework of the Geneva process, followed by the talks held in Sochi on 29 and 30 January. My delegation cherishes the hope that the proposals stemming from the Sochi talks, including the establishment of a committee tasked with drawing up a new constitution, will receive consistent attention from the international community, as part of the concerted quest to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Syria.

The situation on the ground is deeply alarming. Military operations that include the use of non-conventional weapons are leading to mass displacements of people, the loss of human lives, injuries and the destruction of public infrastructure, including hospitals and schools. The grave humanitarian crisis spawned by the fighting led to the adoption by the Security Council this past Saturday, 24 February, of resolution 2401 (2018), with a view to the cessation without delay of hostilities for a 30-day period to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need as well as medical evacuations.

My delegation notes with regret that the adoption of the resolution did not contribute to restoring calm on the ground. The ceasefire proposed was short-lived, despite the numerous appeals for a cessation of hostilities. Even the very minimum one called for by the Russian Federation, an ally of the Damascus Government, on Monday 26 February did not lead to a positive response. Air raids and rocket launches continue on the ground, thereby obstructing the work of humanitarian personnel.

We deplore the ongoing loss of life among humanitarian workers — 22 United Nations personnel and 66 staff members or volunteers of the International Red Cross — and we deplore also the material damage that has been wrought, which includes the destruction of 25 vehicles and 44 facilities, according to the information we have received. Nonetheless, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the fact that United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners have managed to assist people in need by conducting 1,567 deliveries.

My country reaffirms that a resolution of the crisis in Syria must be part of an inclusive dialogue and political process, as set out in the road map under resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, my country calls for full compliance with the 30-day ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018), which will not only allow humanitarian actors to respond to critical emergencies but also create the conditions for a return to the negotiating table by all parties to the Syrian crisis. To that end, Côte d'Ivoire urges the members of the Security Council to unite and surmount their differences in order to send a message of hope and solidarity of the international community to the Syrian people.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As usual, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman just gave us detailed briefings on the humanitarian and political situation in Syria. Those were the first briefings to be delivered to the Security Council following the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), on 24 February. I take this opportunity to thank both Under-Secretaries-General, as well as to acknowledge the willingness of the United Nations and its partners to send convoys of trucks with the necessary humanitarian aid and begin medical evacuations as soon as conditions on the ground allow.

As Secretary-General António Guterres said two days ago in his statement before the Human Rights Council, "Security Council resolutions are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented". The Republic of Equatorial Guinea hopes resolution 2401 (2018) is meaningful in that way in order to relieve the affected population of the suffering it has endured, especially in eastern Ghouta, that is, we hope for it to be immediately implemented.

We want to reiterate that the Syrian conflict has no military solution. The opponents therefore must take a seat at the negotiating table to engage in direct and frank dialogue, without exclusions, however complicated it may be to do so. It must be the Syrians who determine the future they want for their country. The international community must redouble its efforts in making sure the opponents engage in negotiations, and the countries that have influence need to wield it to establish trust, with the ultimate goal of achieving lasting and just peace in Syria. We commend the intention expressed by the largest opposition groups — Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham — to respect the ceasefire, and we invite all the other parties involved to take the same decision.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that the only reason that the humanitarian situation remains of concern is because the opponents do not agree on negotiating to reach a peace agreement, which consequently causes more civilian victims, leads to the destruction of hospital facilities and hampers humanitarian aid operations. The conflict has recently intensified around the town of eastern Ghouta and some other parts of Syria, which has resulted in civilian casualties, the destruction of a considerable number of medical and relief facilities and the obstruction of humanitarian relief operations led by the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea is very touched and horrified by the critical situation the Syrian people are experiencing, and we must not show indifference to so much pain and suffering. It is therefore imperative that the parties to the conflict implement and uphold the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially the most recent, resolution 2401 (2018), including allowing access to humanitarian aid, halting hostilities and ultimately, cooperating with the United Nations in its efforts to assuage the conflict and make humanitarian operations effective by ensuring aid deliveries reach the affected populations and evacuating the sick and seriously injured so that they can receive the necessary medical care. The international community, while striving to help Syria, must not forget the neighbouring countries that have welcomed refugees and shown a spirit of solidarity worthy of praise.

I would like to conclude my statement by expressing well-deserved tribute to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all those who work with it on the ground for their bravery and determination in fulfilling their humanitarian mission to deliver aid to

those in need. We encourage them to persist in their noble efforts.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their comprehensive and sobering briefings.

Kazakhstan welcomed the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). That document should be urgently implemented to ensure a comprehensive ceasefire in Syria. The ceasefire regime should be implemented fully, especially in the areas of eastern Ghouta, southern Idlib and northern Hama, to resolve their long-accumulated acute humanitarian problems, deliver aid to the most difficult regions and evacuate the wounded and sick.

Turning to the situation on the ground in the country, according to our humanitarian colleagues, over the past 78 hours and to our deep regret, military operations continued to be reported in besieged eastern Ghouta, resulting in deaths, including women and children. Attacks on Damascus from eastern Ghouta are also continuing. To our great disappointment, a Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse in a Damascus suburb was reportedly struck by shelling. During the same period, attacks on the city of Damascus and the governorate resulted in 14 deaths and 214 injured.

We are glad to know that the United Nations has mobilized and is ready to immediately support life-saving aid convoys in several areas in eastern Ghouta. We therefore call on the Council members and the wider United Nations membership to assist the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in operationalizing the delivery of humanitarian assistance in eastern Ghouta, as well as in carrying out hundreds of medical evacuations. We echo the United Nations calls on all parties to facilitate unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country and take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as required by international law. It is equally important to ensure, in close coordination with OCHA, the protection of medical and humanitarian workers. We must also insist that parties support United Nation agencies in the fulfilment of their mandates. In that context, Kazakhstan proposes that all-round assistance be provided to the inter-Syrian negotiations through the Astana process and that positive developments be taken advantage of to improve the humanitarian situation.

My country stands for a solution in Syria based on resolution 2254 (2015), the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and agreements on the de-escalation zones reached through the Astana process. We regret the lack of full agreement and close coordination among the key stakeholders in managing the Syrian crisis. We also attach great importance to strengthening the inter-Syrian political dialogue with greater support from the world community. Lastly, Kazakhstan notes the need to establish closer interaction among the leading stakeholders in Syria, in particular between the Russian Federation and the United States, to improve the political process and ensure positive changes on the humanitarian track.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their briefings. China commends the United Nations aid agencies for their humanitarian relief efforts in Syria. The security situation in various parts of Syria, including Damascus and eastern Ghouta, has escalated recently, causing significant civilian casualties. We sympathize profoundly with the suffering of the Syrian people and condemn all acts of violence against innocent civilians. The parties concerned should take immediate measures to de-escalate the tensions in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) demonstrates the consensus and unity of its members on the humanitarian issue in Syria. We appreciate the positive efforts of the parties concerned. China welcomed Russia's announcement by Russia that it will implement the ceasefire measures and assist with the evacuation of people from conflict areas. We call on the parties in Syria to put an immediate end to hostilities in accordance with the resolution, actively coordinate with United Nations relief efforts and ensure safe humanitarian corridors in the relevant areas.

A political settlement is the only viable solution to the Syrian issue. The Syrian National Dialogue Congress was recently held successfully in Sochi and has had positive results. Special Envoy de Mistura is making ongoing efforts to advance the Syrian political process. The international community should support the Syrian parties in resuming dialogue and negotiations under the auspices of United Nations mediation as soon

as possible and in seeking a solution that is acceptable to all parties through a Syrian-owned and -led political process. That is the only way to fundamentally ease the humanitarian situation in Syria and end the suffering of the Syrian people without delay.

Terrorist organizations are still launching attacks in Syria, causing significant civilian casualties and impeding United Nations humanitarian relief efforts. The international community should strengthen its cooperation on counter-terrorism, adopt unified standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations that are designated as such by the Security Council.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for their comprehensive briefings.

We would like to express our gratitude to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for their continuing efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians. As Mr. Lowcock said, the humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to be a devastating one. Military activities in various parts of the country, including eastern Ghouta, have affected the ability of the United Nations to deliver lifesaving assistance to all in need. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/138) says, the conflict and other obstacles have had a disastrous effect on the level of humanitarian access.

In order to address those challenges and to alleviate the Syrians' suffering, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding the institution without delay of a cessation of hostilities for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria so as to ensure the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services and medical evacuations. As we all emphasized on Saturday after welcoming the resolution's adoption (see S/PV.8186), what is now required is its full and comprehensive implementation with the immediate engagement of all parties and those with influence on them. Of course, we understand and appreciate the fact that the United Nations is ready to provide immediate humanitarian aid across the country. However, as Mr. Lowcock just highlighted, there are still military activities in various areas. In that regard, we call on all the parties to fully implement resolution 2401 (2018) for the sake of the Syrian people, who have continued to bear the brunt of the conflict for almost eight years.

We appreciate any measure taken by Member States to facilitate the implementation of the ceasefire, including the humanitarian pause and humanitarian corridor announced by the Russian Federation. At the same time, it is obvious that more needs to be done to fully implement the resolution. It is therefore imperative to take urgent and coordinated action to bring about an immediate ceasefire, thereby ensuring that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have safe, sustained and needs-based access in order to deliver humanitarian aid to all Syrians in need of assistance.

In conclusion, it is ultimately a comprehensive, Syrian-led political solution, facilitated by the United Nations on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), that can sustainably end the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their briefings. By the way, at the outset I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to ask Mr. Lowcock where the United Nations is getting its evidence and data on deaths in Damascus, for instance. According to the Syrian authorities' information, for example, just since 22 January, 12 people have died in Damascus, while the United Nations figure is 11 for the whole month. Where is he getting his information from? The White Helmets, maybe?

Today, as has been usual recently, the United States delegation devoted its statement to Russia. It told us that it knew what we were going to say today, which it does not. And I am pleased about that, because it means that it did not see our statement before the meeting began.

On 24 January, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), in an important decision aimed at improving the humanitarian situation in Syria, especially in areas where the danger of military clashes remains or there are obstacles of one kind or another to the civilian population's access to essential assistance. Today many questions have been asked — emphatic questions, rhetorical questions, questions aimed directly at us. We answered the questions asked of us during our discussion at the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). There are a lot of people here who like to pick citations from the resolution that they like and forget the ones that do not suit them. If I may, I will quote two extracts from it, from paragraph 1 and paragraph 10.

(*spoke in English*)

> "Demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay, and engage immediately to ensure full and comprehensive implementation of this demand by all parties, for a durable humanitarian pause for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria, to enable the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and ... medical evacuations".
>
> "[U]nderscores the need for the parties to agree on humanitarian pauses, days of tranquillity, localized ceasefires and truces to allow humanitarian agencies safe and unhindered access to all affected areas in Syria".

(*spoke in Russian*)

Has everyone read the resolution? We have said, and we will say it again, that any sustained pause must be preceded by an agreement between the parties on de-escalation. The demands that military activity end overnight are either the result of a misunderstanding of the realities or a deliberate exploitation of this human tragedy. The statement by the United States delegation simply rewrote resolution 2401 (2018). What sort of joint effort, such as the Permanent Representative of France called for today, can we talk about in these circumstances after what we heard today in the United States delegation's statement? Russia has announced the establishment in eastern Ghouta of daily five-hour humanitarian pauses. Everything possible is being done to ensure that they function successfully. Specifically, medical and temporary accommodation posts have been equipped, ambulance teams organized, motor transport provided. We call on the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other recognized humanitarian organizations to join these efforts.

However, on the very first day, the militias took advantage of the announcement of the pause to go on the offensive. The same thing happened on the second day. The mortar shelling continued, including in the humanitarian operations corridors. Not a single person was able to leave the danger area. We took note of the relevant letters submitted on behalf of the illegal armed groups. We were told previously that the most convenient way of informing Council members about them was being sought. It has been found and it is indeed highly original — directly through the work e-mail addresses of all the political coordinators, meaning that someone deliberately sent the relevant contact information to dubious individuals from the ranks of the radical Syrian opposition. It is very similar to the situation that occurred when information about the closed negotiations on humanitarian resolutions became available to Western media agencies.

However, we hope that the opposition leaders are serious and that their deeds will match their words. We are expecting clear guarantees in that regard from the militias' foreign sponsors, many of whom are seated around this table. The first thing that is needed is a definitive repudiation of the terrorist organizations. It has to be understood that terrorists continue to be a legitimate target of military operations, and we will not stand on ceremony with them. Overall, we have to decide on the most effective way to neutralize Jabhat Al-Nusra in eastern Ghouta. Why can't some members show a willingness to cooperate on that issue? Or do they not want to?

The information background to this issue is overheated to the point of no return. If we had not adopted resolution 2401 (2018), it is difficult even to imagine what the Western media outlets would have made of it or how they would have portrayed Russia. But even now, when the resolution has been adopted, our Western partners act as if everything in it pertains solely to Damascus and Russia, and that its successful implementation depends almost entirely on the will of our two countries, while they, the self-styled champions of humanity, somehow imagine that they have an exclusive right to lecture us on the subject. In various media outlets, especially American ones, there have been false allegations that we mock the tragedy of this war and the situation in eastern Ghouta, and that we say that the campaign is exaggerated and fake.

I will ask these humanistic gentlemen once again: Where were they when American aircraft blew Raqqa off the face of the Earth? Where were the cries and the hand-wringing? Months have passed since the terrorists were banished from that city and yet it is still uninhabitable. On top of that, there are new reports of 24 civilian casualties from Coalition air strikes in Deir ez-Zor province. Who are they — second-class citizens? Or when innocent people die from democratic bombs, is that somehow immaterial — perhaps even honourable? We urge the United Nations — in fact, we insist — to send an assessment mission to Raqqa as soon as possible, and that the Coalition, which is in de facto control of the area, give it all necessary support. We also expect that instead of establishing quasi-

administrations in areas liberated from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Coalition leadership will come up with a plan to turn them over to the central authorities, in consideration of the Security Council's repeated affirmations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That would be a great deal more constructive than the relentless quest to find what is a non-existent basis in international law for maintaining its presence on Syrian territory.

If Council members have interesting ideas on how to raise the profile of local Government and find effective ways to rebuild the ethnic and religious balance that existed before the war, they should present them to the Syrians in the negotiations in Geneva and let them decide the issues for themselves through the mediation of the United Nations. We also demand that the Coalition open humanitarian access to the territory it is occupying around the Al-Tanf military base in order to bring aid to the residents of the Rukban camp as soon as possible. By the way, that is also a provision of resolution 2401 (2018).

It is not for nothing that we keep saying that what is going on is painfully reminiscent of the situation in eastern Aleppo when the West unleashed a wave of monstrous anti-Russian hysteria. We are the only country being asked to implement resolution 2401 (2018). We are being criticized for instituting humanitarian pauses. Some claim that there are not enough of them. Demands, demands, demands. For some reason, someone is always bossily demanding something of Russia. Britain's Foreign Secretary has altogether decided that he is the prosecutor who is threatening to punish our country. Apparently, he called for today's meeting to be convened. He said so himself.

The Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic is making daily and hourly efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities, establish humanitarian pauses and ease the suffering of civilians. May I ask what other members have done to implement resolution 2401 (2018)? Has even one of their countries lifted a finger? Have they brought their influence to bear on those whom they consider the moderate opposition? Have they persuaded them to lay down their weapons and stop taking hostages?

The hugely complex issue that the Syrian conflict represents is being used for unscrupulous purposes. The rivers of tears roll down only when the next stronghold where militias and terrorists mingle is threatened, at which point an unheard-of level of action kicks in. The real aim is the regime, as some members like to refer to the lawful Syrian authorities. Any hint of its success in fighting terrorism on its own territory is a thorn in their side. They are ready to use any means to stop it.

This is a warning. We know about the chemical evidence being fabricated in order to blame Damascus. We know about the meetings on the subject, where they are being held and who is taking part in them. Today we once again heard unsubstantiated allegations about the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons. I am tired of asking if members understand the futility of Damascus using chemical weapons from both a military and a political point of view, and the completely believable probability of militias using chemical provocations. I think they do understand it perfectly, but they persist in seeking an excuse for military intervention. United States officials, and the head of the Foreign Office and others, have already talked about military strikes against Syria, and it is obvious where that intellectual activity is heading. We urge everyone to stop the dirty tricks and join the concerted efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria by implementing the resolution we have just adopted. We hope that the United Nations generally and Mr. Lowcock personally, as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, will rise to the occasion.

We have circulated a draft presidential statement on the resolution's implementation. We have placed it under the silence procedure until 1 p.m., and we call on the Council to adopt it. We hope that there will be no objections before one o'clock. I will take the liberty of reading it out.

(*spoke in English*)

The Security Council, with reference to its resolution 2401 (2018), urges all parties to implement it and, to this end, further urges all armed groups and all Member States with influence on them to ensure the safety of the announced humanitarian corridors for evacuation from eastern Ghouta. The Security Council calls for the establishment of similar humanitarian corridors in Al-Tanf and Rukban. The Security Council requests the Secretary-General to expeditiously send a mission to Raqqa to assess humanitarian needs there.

(*spoke in Russian*)

And by the way, we, like the other members of the Security Council, believe that there can only be a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We are doing everything we can to achieve that, and certainly somewhat more than those who have been spreading fire and fury today. We propose, as we have always proposed, that they join in these efforts, rather than throw up road blocks in an attempt to serve their own geopolitical agendas.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

First of all, the delegation of Kuwait aligns itself to the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of our two countries as co-penholders on the issue of Syria. We thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their briefings. Four days after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which demands that all parties cease hostilities throughout Syrian territory for 30 days, I would like to make the following points.

We have said from the outset that resolution 2401 (2018) is only the first step towards improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. However, to date we have not seen the implementation of the provisions of the resolution — not even a partial implementation — as we heard from Mr. Lowcock this morning, in particular in eastern Ghouta. The Council demonstrated unity in adopting the resolution and it is up to us now to ensure that all its provisions are implemented in full and immediately in order to alleviate the suffering of our brethren in Syria and to protect civilians. The resolution is binding on all, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, we welcome the fact that the United Nations is ready to come to eastern Ghouta and other besieged areas so as to deliver all kinds of aid and assistance to those that need them. We call on all the parties to the conflict in Syria to uphold international humanitarian law and abide by the provisions of the resolution, which cover all the various aspects that are causing the daily suffering of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, we underscore the importance of members of the Council making their contribution by spurring all the parties to the conflict in Syria to immediately implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018), keeping in mind that, as co-penholders, we are committed to closely follow its implementation, including ensuring a briefing by the Secretariat 15 days after the adoption of the resolution.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In accordance with to rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Government has examined the forty-eighth monthly report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and, yesterday morning, as usual, we sent a formal letter to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council setting forth the position of the Syrian Government on the report.

We are realistic. We know well that the United Nations is not a charitable organization. That is clear given that it has been unable to implement the principles of the Charter and international law since its inception — and the Palestinian question is a case in point. There have been other failures by the United Nations: in Iraq, Libya, the former Yugoslavia, Grenada — for those who have forgotten Grenada — Nicaragua, and the list goes on. However, I hope we can preserve the United Nations as an organization even as it continues to lack charitability. I would now like to make the following points.

First, the Syrian Government is fully committed to the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as Syrian law and the Syrian Constitution, all of which stipulate that the Syrian Government has the responsibility to ensure the safety and security of Syrian citizens and protect them from terrorist groups.

Secondly, the current report, just like previous reports, has a great flaw, namely, that the authors of the report continue to rely on politicized sources, open sources and unreliable figures. At the same time, the report continues to ignore credible Government sources and even the reports issued by the representatives of the United Nations in Syria. Those representatives, along with the reports they have submitted to the United Nations in New York, acknowledge the efforts

of the Syrian Government and its cooperation on the humanitarian issue. However, none of this information that reaches New York appears to be mentioned in the report, as if by miracle.

Thirdly, the Syrian Government condemns the authors of the report — the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — especially after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), for their failure to mention the Turkish aggression against the Syrian city of Afrin. That aggression has claimed the lives of many people, including women and children, destroyed public and private facilities and has led to the displacement of the city's inhabitants and a severe shortage of humanitarian goods. However, Afrin is not eastern Ghouta, eastern Aleppo, Fo'ah or Kefreya.

Fourthly, the Syrian Government fully rejects the failure of the authors of the report to mention the catastrophic impact of the so-called International Coalition and its members. The Coalition, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and members of the Syrian forces who are fighting Da'esh, committed two new massacres yesterday that claimed the lives of 29 civilians and injured dozens, most of them women and children, in the villages of Sha'fa and Thuhret Allouni in eastern Deir ez-Zor. It appears that the International Coalition is focused on this part of eastern Deir ez-Zor because it is home to civilians who do not host Da'esh or Al-Nusra Front terrorists. The Coalition has also destroyed the city of Raqqa, as my colleague the representative of the Russian Federation just noted. My Government calls once again for dismantling this illegitimate aggressive Coalition and for an immediately stop to its crimes against the Syrian people.

The Russian military issued a communiqué today saying that the areas under the control of the allies and agents of the United States in Syria are witnessing the worst humanitarian crisis currently in the country. Those areas have become black holes, just like the black holes in outer space.

With regard to the situation in eastern Ghouta, the Syrian Government believes that the current deterioration in the situation is due to the fact that terrorist groups there have launched attacks against residential zones and military targets. Up until yesterday, they had launched more than 2,180 missiles and mortars against the city of Damascus. Those attacks claimed the lives of 66 civilians and injured 474 others.

Government forces have been forced to respond to those attacks and to carry out their constitutional responsibility in guaranteeing security and safety for the citizens. My Government condemns the use, by the authors of the report, of the term "besieged areas" when considering the situation in eastern Ghouta, in rural Damascus. Under pressure from influential countries in and outside of the Council, they continue to deliberately ignore the fact that people in eastern Ghouta are besieged from within by the various armed terrorist organizations operating there. Those terrorist organizations are exploiting civilians and using them as human shields. They are seizing and monopolizing humanitarian assistance, distributing the aid to their supporters or selling it at exorbitant prices, as was the case in eastern Aleppo.

Syria regrets the failure of the authors of the report to refer to the suffering of thousands of kidnapped people who are in eastern Ghouta prisons and other places where the terrorist groups are spread. The kidnapped people include women, children and elderly. These people were kidnapped from their homes and places of work and have been subjected to the worst forms of torture. There are civilians, including from city of Adra and from Latakia, who were kidnapped from their homes five years ago. The Syrian Government also condemns the statements by the Secretariat and reports of the Secretary-General, which continue up till now to disregard the suffering of 8 million civilians in the capital Damascus as a result of hundreds of missiles and mortars launched daily from terrorist groups within eastern Ghouta.

The accusations by the authors of the report, like those of the Western countries that have influence on them, that the Syrian Government is allegedly besieging Ghouta have been consistently refuted. They have proven to be unfounded, as we have seen in recent reports noting that the Saudi regime provided "aid" to eastern Ghouta in February. That proves, first, that eastern Ghouta is not besieged and, secondly, that it is possible to access it. In particular, the terrorist groups in Ghouta continue to receive arms and munitions from Governments that support terrorism, including Saudi Arabia's so-called humanitarian assistance.

The Syrian Government is more committed than anyone to protecting its citizens across Syria. In that

regard, it has taken all necessary measures to protect its citizens and to respond to the attacks of terrorist groups in eastern Ghouta. We have sought to protect these civilians from the terrorists by establishing a humanitarian corridor to ensure their exit from eastern Ghouta. We announced the humanitarian corridor only hours after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) in order to ensure the safety of civilians — in cooperation with our Russian friends and allies. We have provided them with shelter, food, medicine and medical care at the expense of the Syrian Government, not the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Syrian Government has also called on members of the armed groups to lay down their weapons, cease their terrorist activities inside residential areas and engage in national reconciliation efforts. However, those terrorist groups, including the Al-Nusra Front, Jaysh al-Islam and Faylak ar-Rahman, have forcibly prevented civilians from reaching the corridor, as some members of the Council may know. They also sought to target the humanitarian corridor after it was announced, through the use of mortars.

As for the letter sent by the terrorist Mohamed Alloush, it is a clear indication that he rejects the exit of civilians from Ghouta. It is clear that he wants to use them as human shields. There seems to be a new trend in the United Nations to circulate a letter from a terrorist group as an official document. That is an innovation at the United Nations. There is no respect for the Member States concerned.

We have followed closely the way resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted and today's statements and briefings. We can clearly say that the main goal behind the adoption of the resolution is neither to reach a clear truce or ceasefire, as some may claim, nor to protect civilians and meet their needs. The main goal was to use the Security Council once again as a means to prevent any progress by the Syrian army and its allies in the fight against the terrorist groups that are targeting the city of Damascus. I say that for the thousandth time. How else to explain the fact that the resolution fails to refer to any Council resolution on counter-terrorism? Who can explain to us the strong resistance of some States during the negotiations on the draft resolution to any text that excludes Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and the terrorist groups affiliated with them from the supposed ceasefire? For three days, the Council has continued to negotiate the issue of whether to include or exclude them.

The false humanitarian propaganda on the situation in eastern Ghouta coincided with another campaign under the supervision of the United States, claiming the use of chemical weapons again in Syria, in areas under the exclusive control of terrorists or, I should say, the White Helmets. Today, *The New York Times* published a Tin-Tin style, childish report claiming that there is cooperation on the chemical issue between my country and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The article is a full-page report on the front page of *The New York Times*. It seeks to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It ends by saying that this information is not substantiated.

> "Though experts who viewed the report said the evidence it cited did not prove definitively that there was current, continuing collaboration between North Korea and Syria on chemical weapons."

That is a word-for-word quote from *The New York Times*.

It seems that *The New York Times* is not up to date on what is going on in the world. It seems that the New York Times does not know that the American vessel, the *MV Cape Ray*, destroyed the chemical arsenal voluntarily submitted by the Syrian Government after joining the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as a full member. That is old information, déjà vu, as is said in French. However, it seems that *The New York Times* has decided to address this issue today.

I will read a communiqué that we received just now of information that I think should be taken into consideration when addressing the issue of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. And I can tell the Council that terrorists will use chemical weapons in Syria. On the morning of 20 February, four days ago, three Turkish trucks carrying chlorine entered Idlib governorate through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. I think that *The New York Times* should verify that information. Two trucks stopped in the village of Qalb Loze in Idlib, and the third continued its way to Al-Habit village in northern Idlib. Information available to the Syrian Government points to the fact that terrorists are currently preparing for a chemical weapon using the substance of chlorine on a large scale and to then accuse the Syrian Arab Army of using such weapons. Those terrorists have clear instructions from Western and Turkish intelligence to fabricate a chemical attack before 13 March, because

it is on that date that the eighty-seventh session of the Executive Council of the OPCW will be held.

According to the information I received just now, the two trucks are currently in the school of Qalb Loze village. Other cars and terrorists are also currently in the school, which they have turned into a warehouse for chemical weapons. As for the third truck, it is currently in a centre belonging to the Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, which is a Turkish agent, in the north-eastern part of Al-Habit village. A vast number of terrorists are currently unloading the truck there. In providing the Security Council with this information, we affirm that these terrorists, at the instructions of their operators, will use these chemical weapons before 13 March.

The main responsibility for ending hostilities lies with those countries that have real influence with terrorist groups in Ghouta and other parts of Syria. They should compel these terrorist groups to stop their terrorist activities and allow civilians to leave those areas, which are used by these groups as a base to launch their terrorist attacks.

There is in this Organization a group of five countries that are shedding tears over the humanitarian situation in Syria. Unfortunately, some of them are members of the Council. They have invited Member States to watch a movie about the White Helmets, two days from now in the Economic and Social Council Chamber here at the United Nations. Some members of the Council are advocating for a group that has been designated as a terrorist group by the Council. I hope that the Council will address the information I have provided seriously and appropriately.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of February, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Kuwait to the members of the Security Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staff and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us.

Indeed, February has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of all the delegations and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all the relevant conference service officers, interpreters, translators and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of the Netherlands good luck in the month of March.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.